

February 18, 2014

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SUBJECT: Environment Committee Public Hearing – S.B. 70

IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 70, *An Act Concerning The Preservation Of Lands Under The Control Of The Department Of Energy And Environmental Protection And The Department Of Agriculture.*

Senator Meyer, Representative Gentile and members of the Environment Committee; I appreciate the opportunity to provide this testimony in **support of S.B. 70** – An Act Concerning the Preservation of Lands Under the Control of the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and the Department of Agriculture.

I retired from state service as Assistant Director of State Parks. I was the second Executive Director of Citizens for the Protection of Public Land (CPPL). I am the President of the East Haddam Land Trust, Chairman of the East Haddam Conservation Commission and a member of East Haddam's Open Space Committee.

As a state park Manager and later Assistant Director, one of my most important duties was the protection of our State's open space – state parks and forests, wildlife management areas, historic preservation properties and other supposed State "protected" open space. I was dismayed to learn that State-owned lands, many which the public assumes are sacrosanct, are not really protected in perpetuity at all. The "Haddam Land Swap" illustrated this deficit for all to see and because of my previous work history it was imperative for me to work against the "SWAP"! Currently, as the "SWAP" sadly illustrated, our State open space lands, including those acquired through the Recreational and Natural Heritage Trust Program, are vulnerable to transfer for commercial development or other uses far outside the parameters under which they were acquired. At this point, they apparently have no legal protection!

S.B. 70 will provide the interim important protection needed to preserve these open space properties until a **Constitutional Amendment** can be enacted that will permanently protect them or require a super-majority of both chambers before they can be taken or disposed!

The "Haddam Land Swap" illustrated how the public felt about the usurping of "protected" open space. Dozens of conservation organizations and hundreds of individuals were willing to sign their name in protest. On the local level, I believe the recent election of CPPL's founder and first Executive Director Melissa Schlag as Haddam's First Selectman illustrates how a local electorate feels about the importance of open space in their town!

S.B. 70, in protecting our important open space assets, requires the needed transparency, oversight and (most importantly) protection that the citizens of this State expect of their legislators and government officials.

Sincerely,

Robert R. Smith